



The New York Public Library
Billy Rose Theatre Division

Guide to the

Bertha Kalich papers

1866-1955

*T-Mss 1991-005

Processed by Cynthia Tobar, staff.

Summary

Creator: Kalich, Bertha, 1874-1939

Title: Bertha Kalich papers

Date: 1866-1955

Size: 8 linear feet (23 boxes)

Source: The Bertha Kalich Papers were donated to the Billy Rose Theatre Division in 1991.

Abstract: This collection comprises the papers of the Polish singer and actress Bertha Kalich who immigrated to the United States in 1895. Once in the United States, she became a celebrated star of the Yiddish theater, with active roles in theater as well as cinema, until 1928 when she succumbed to illness. One of her best known roles was the title character of the play *Magda* and *Lilla Olrick* in *Jacobi's Riddle Woman*. The collection consists of correspondence, personal and professional papers, and theatrical memorabilia from Bertha, her husband, Leopold Spachner, and daughter Lillian Kalich Spachner concerning her stage career and is primarily in English with some materials in German, Yiddish, and Hebrew.

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Preferred citation: Bertha Kalich Papers, *T-Mss 1991-005. Billy Rose Theatre Division, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

Language of the Material: This collection contains materials in English, though a great many clippings and some scripts are in Yiddish, and some early official documents are in German and Hebrew

Processing note: Processed by Cynthia Tobar, staff; Machine-readable finding aid created by Cynthia Tobar.

Related Materials:

One oversize scrapbook of clippings (1918-1922) is available on microfilm at the Humanities Library-Microforms Room 121; call number *ZC-342.

Creator History

Bertha Rachel Kalich, daughter of Solomon Kalich and Babette Haber, was born on September 8, 1874 in Lemberg, Galicia (Poland), where she trained in declamation and voice culture from an early age despite the disapproval of her conservative Jewish family. While a student at Lemberg's Conservatory of Music, she met Leopold Spachner, a fellow student, whom she married in 1892. Starting as a chorus singer in Lemberg, Kalich soon achieved wide acclaim on the Polish and Romanian stages, despite deep anti-Semitic sentiment that made such success an unlikely prospect. In 1895, Kalich and Spachner immigrated to the United States where Kalich enjoyed great success in the Yiddish theater until 1905. In that year, Harrison Grey Fiske persuaded Kalich to attempt a transition to the American stage. After only a few months she mastered English pronunciation sufficiently to manage the transition and became an immediate success. She appeared in plays by Sudermann, Maeterlinck, Tolstoy, and Shaw with occasional returns to the Yiddish stage, and was successful, as well, in the cinema. Her most famous, and often repeated, roles were as Magda in Sudermann's play of that name and Lilla Orluck in Jacobi's *Riddle Woman*. Kalich toured tirelessly in both the United States and Canada, her 'emotional' brand of acting winning her great acclaim. From the 1880s through the 1940s, the Lower East Side of New York was a thriving center of theater for the waves of Jewish immigrants arriving in America, appealing to the popular sentiments of the day. Yiddish theater was attended by rich and poor, educated and illiterate allowed to blossom in New York, away from the growing anti-Semitism in turn of the century Eastern Europe. Bertha Kalich, who immigrated to the United States in 1895 after a successful career in Poland, was the first woman to gain prominence in the male-dominated environment of the Yiddish stage. Popularly known as the "Yiddish Bernhardt", Kalich took on the role of Hamlet in 1901 at the Thalia Theatre on the Bowery, effectively establishing her own reputation as the greatest tragedienne in the history of Yiddish theatre.

In 1928, Kalich took ill during a run of *The Soul of a Woman*. From that time on, she was unable to work more than sporadically. Threatened with blindness, she underwent a series of operations. Between 1931 and 1936, friends in the theatrical world arranged a number of benefit performances to aid her in an unsuccessful battle to regain her health--that decimated her fortune and embittered her. Correspondence among members of the family from 1928 on indicates that Kalich became despondent and felt abandoned by her husband and daughter, although the accuracy of her perception is not borne out by the documentation in the collection. On the other hand, there is evidence in these letters that she alienated many long-time associates outside the family. Kalich died on April 19, 1939, in New York City.

Leopold Spachner (1871-1952), some of whose business records and correspondence are included in this collection, was involved in the theatrical world both as his wife's manager and as a general theatrical manager. Spachner died in New York City, having survived Bertha Kalich by 13 years.

Lillian Kalich/Spachner (1891-?), was born on June 17 in Lemberg, emigrating to the United States as an infant. She attended the Ethical Culture School in New York City from 1905-1907 under the name Lillian Spachner, and the Baldwin School in Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania from October 1907-1908. She also took up residence on the West Coast in the late 1920's, and read scripts there for Paramount and Metro-Goldwyn Mayer in 1932-1933. In 1954 and 1955, she was again in residence in New York City, as letters addressed to her by Paul Muni and Iphigene Sulzberger attest. Although Lillian Kalich/Spachner's active assistance to her mother until 1930 is amply recorded in the material contained in the collection, many important facts about her life cannot be traced in these records.

Scope and Content Note

The papers consist of correspondence, programs, financial records, clippings, contracts, scripts, sides, scores, publicity pieces, photographs, and scrapbooks connected with Bertha Kalich. The majority of the materials are in English, though a great many clippings and some scripts are in Yiddish, and some early official documents are in German and Hebrew. The materials in this collection provide a valuable look at the history of Yiddish theatre on the Lower East Side of New York.

The collection also includes some papers connected with Kalich's husband, Leopold Spachner, such as business correspondence and official documents, and a group of letters Spachner wrote to their daughter, Lillian, in 1928-1929, when Bertha Kalich was both physically ill and mentally depressed and was accusing her family of disloyalty and indifference. The visitor's book from Leopold Spachner's funeral, as well as nineteenth-century documents (some in fragile condition) are among the holdings; these documents include school certificates in German and a wedding contract in Hebrew. The collection also includes papers belonging to Lillian Kalich/Spachner such as some school papers, personal, professional, and business correspondence. A large number of telegrams and letters from Bertha Kalich to Lillian are also included here as well as other personal and professional materials such as school records and scripts.

Arrangement: Series I: Correspondence, 1900-1955; undated Series II: Professional Papers, 1866-1942; undated Series III: Family Papers, 1882-1952; undated Series IV: Scripts, 1910-1940; undated Series V: Photographs, 1892-1935; undated Series VI: Clippings, 1895-1949; undated Series VII: Scrapbooks, 1905-1927; undated

Key Terms

Occupations

Actresses

Genre/Physical Characteristic

Clippings
Contracts
Correspondence
Ephemera
Financial records
Photographs
Promotional material
Scores
Scrapbooks
Scripts

Subjects

Theater, Yiddish -- United States

Names

Dreiser, Theodore, 1871-1945
Fields, W. C., 1879-1946
Fiske, Harrison Grey, 1861-1942
Kalich, Bertha, 1874-1939
Spachner, Leopold, 1871-1952
Spachner, Lillian Kalich, 1891-
Tucker, Sophie, 1884-1966

Container List

Series I: Correspondence 1900-1955, undated (4 boxes)

This series consists of personal and professional correspondence pertaining to Bertha Kalich, as well as Lillian Kalich and Leopold Spachner.

Alphabetical

Subseries 1: Bertha Kalich's Correspondence 1900-1939, undated (2 boxes)

This subseries consists of personal and professional correspondence, including letters from Theodore Dreiser, Mrs. H. C. DeMille, Jacob Adler, W.C. Fields, and Sophie Tucker, as well as a substantial amount of correspondence from Harrison Grey Fiske and his wife Minnie Maddern Fiske. The subseries is also comprised of business correspondence connected with Kalich's husband, Leopold Spachner, and a group of letters Spachner wrote to their daughter, Lillian, when Bertha Kalich was both physically ill and mentally depressed. A large number of personal and professional correspondences between Bertha Kalich to Lillian are also included.

Alphabetical

- b. 1 f. 1 A 1908-1936, undated
Includes correspondence from Jacob Adler.
- b. 1 f. 2 B 1908-1938, undated
- b. 1 f. 3 C 1907-1939, undated
- b. 1 f. 4 D-E 1909-1936, undated
Includes letters from Theodore Dreiser and Mrs. H.C. DeMille.
- b. 1 f. 5 F 1905-1935, undated
Includes correspondence from Harrison Gray Fiske and Minnie Maddern Fiske, and also from W.C. Fields.
- b. 1 f. 6 G-H 1908-1938, undated
- b. 1 f. 7 I 1913-1926, undated
- b. 1 f. 8 J 1910-1936, undated
- b. 1 f. 9 K 1907-1931, undated
- b. 2 f. 1 L 1900-1937, undated
- b. 2 f. 2 M 1907-1937, undated
- b. 2 f. 3 N-Q 1905-1937, undated
- b. 2 f. 4 R 1913-1938, undated
- b. 2 f. 5 S 1906-1936, undated
- b. 2 f. 6 T 1915-1936, undated
Includes correspondence from Sophie Tucker.
- b. 2 f. 7 U-V 1919-1937, undated
- b. 2 f. 8 W-Z 1909-1938, undated
- b. 2 f. 9 Unidentified 1908, undated

Series I: Correspondence (cont.)

Subseries 2: Family Correspondence 1904-1955, undated (2 boxes)

This subseries contains correspondence from and to Lillian Kalich and Leopold Spachner. Some items of correspondence among members of the family from 1928 on indicate that Kalich became despondent and felt abandoned by her husband and daughter, her perceptions are not borne out by the documentation in this collection. On the other hand, there is evidence in these letters that she alienated many long-time associates outside the family.

Alphabetical

Lillian Kalich/Spachner's Correspondence 1908-1955, undated

- b. 3 f. 1 A-B 1934-1939, undated
- b. 3 f. 2 C-D 1934-1940, undated
- b. 3 f. 3 E-F 1910-1942, undated
- b. 3 f. 4 G-J 1911-1942, undated
- b. 3 f. 5-6 K 1912-1929, undated
- b. 3 f. 7 K-L 1908-1945
- b. 3 f. 8 M-O 1918-1955, undated
- b. 3 f. 9 P-R 1927-1949, undated
- b. 4 f. 1-2 S 1910-1955
- b. 4 f. 3 T-Z 1923-1948, undated
- b. 4 f. 4 Condolence letters and testimonials 1936-1939
- b. 4 f. 5 Unidentified 1922-1928, undated
- b. 4 f. 6 Leopold Spachner's Correspondence 1904-1934

Series II: Professional Papers 1866-1942, undated (2 boxes)

This series consists of posters, programs and flyers, parts of scripts, sides, other pieces for performance, typescripts of interviews, press releases and articles, contracts, and accountants' reports. Also included are notes connected with interviews for an autobiographical series of articles about Bertha Kalich that appeared in *The Day* (in Yiddish) in 1925. Most of these materials are in English, with some material in Yiddish.

Alphabetical

- b. 5 f. 1 Accountants' Reports 1926
- b. 5 f. 2 Certificates 1866-1927, undated
- b. 5 f. 3 Certificates of Copyright 1922-1928, undated
- b. 5 f. 4-6 Contracts 1890-1933, undated
- b. 5 f. 7 Costume Inventory 1942
- b. 5 f. 8 Ephemera 1914-1936, undated
Includes: Lists, programs, performance tickets, receipts, and membership cards.
- b. 5 f. 9 Financial records 1909-1942
- b. 5 f. 10 Furniture inventory 1928-1933, undated
Includes: Receipts and inventory lists.
- b. 5 f. 11-12 Interview notes undated
Notes connected with interviews for an autobiographical series of articles about Bertha Kalich that appeared in *The Day* (in Yiddish) in 1925.
- b. 6 f. 1 Materials for production undated
Includes: Typescripts and color set drawing.
- b. 6 f. 2 Notes regarding *The Slave* undated

Series II: Professional Papers (cont.)

- b. 6 f. 3 Promotional material 1921-1934
Includes: Flyers and programs.
- b. 6 f. 4 Proof for Testimonial Dinner program undated
- b. 6 f. 5 Publicity forms for Supporting Cast of Magda undated
- b. 6 f. 6 Releases for Magda undated
- b. 6 f. 7 Releases for other plays undated
- b. 6 f. 8 Reviews of The Victim undated
- b. 6 f. 9 Scores undated
- b. 6 f. 10 Speeches 1920, undated
- b. 6 f. 11-12 Testimonials undated
- b. 6 f. 13 Tributes and general releases 1923-1926
- b. 6 f. 14 U.S. Passport 1922-1927

Series III: Family Papers 1882-1952, undated (1 box)

The series is comprised of official documents, certificates, and ephemera. These materials are almost entirely in German and Hebrew, with some material in English. The papers of Lillian Kalich/Spachner include her school papers from 1907-1908, when she studied at the Baldwin School, in Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania, as well as script submissions she reviewed while at Paramount and Metro-Goldwyn Mayer in the early 1930s. The papers of Leopold Spachner consist of official documents, including school certificates in German and a wedding contract in Hebrew, as well as some business papers. The visitor's book from Spachner's funeral is also a part of in this collection.

Alphabetical

Lillian Kalich/Spachner papers 1907-1948, undated

- b. 7 f. 1 Article, The Jews in the Berlin Theatre undated
Written by Lillian Kalich.
- b. 7 f. 2 Class notes from Bryn Mawr 1907-1908
- b. 7 f. 3 Costume donation 1939
- b. 7 f. 4 Ephemera 1917-1928
- b. 7 f. 5-9 Script submissions 1932-1948
- Leopold Spachner papers 1882-1952, undated
- b. 7 f. 10 Personal papers 1882-1952, undated
Includes: official documents, school certificates in German, a wedding contract in Hebrew, and the visitor's book from Spachner's funeral
- b. 7 f. 11 Professional papers 1922, undated
Includes: Contracts and business records.

Series IV: Scripts 1910-1940, undated (5 boxes)

This series consists of parts of scripts, sides, promptbooks, and other pieces for performance. There are several sets of sides from *Magda* and *The Kreutzer Sonata*. Most of these materials are in English, with some material in Yiddish.

Alphabetical

- b. 8 f. 1 Dora by Tennyson, Book 5, promptbook undated
- b. 8 f. 2 Edgar Lee Masters, Book 2 undated
- b. 8 f. 3 Fannie, sides undated
Yiddish, transl. Eng.

Series IV: Scripts (cont.)

- b. 8 f. 4 **Fedora** by Victorien Sardou undated
- b. 8 f. 5 **For the Children** by Solotovoff undated
Yiddish, transl. Eng.
- b. 8 f. 6 **Forgotten Sisters** by David Pinski undated
Yiddish, transl. Eng.
- b. 8 f. 7 **Gott, Mensch in Teifel**, sides for Fredoni
Yiddish, transl. Eng.
- b. 8 f. 8 **Hamlet**, prompt copy with handwritten finale undated
In German and performed in Yiddish.
Henele [The Medea] undated
- b. 8 f. 9 **Script**
Yiddish prologue.
- b. 8 f. 10 **Sides for Act 1-3**
The Kreutzer Sonata by Jacob Gordin and adapted by Langson Mitchell
1911-1924, undated
- b. 8 f. 11-14 **Scripts** 1911, 1924, undated
- b. 9 f. 1 **Script with cues** undated
- b. 9 f. 2 **Sides** 1915
Yiddish, transl. Eng.
- b. 9 f. 3 **Mad Prima Donna**, **Script** 1940
Presentation copy with German original
Magda 1915-1927, undated
- b. 9 f. 4 **Alterations to Kalich's part** undated
- b. 9 f. 5-6 **Annotated script** undated
- b. 9 f. 7 **Corrected versions** undated
- b. 9 f. 8-9 **Script** 1927, undated
- b. 10 f. 1 **Script for stage manager** 1926-1927
- b. 10 f. 2 **Annotated sides, Act II** undated
- b. 10 f. 3 **Sides** 1915
Yiddish
- b. 10 f. 4 **Sides, Act II** undated
Annotated with Mr. Winston's corrections.
- b. 10 f. 5 **Poetry, promptbook** 1932
Resurrection 1915, undated
- b. 10 f. 6 **Script** undated
Yiddish, annotated
- b. 10 f. 7 **Sides for Katusa Maslora** 1915
Yiddish, transl. Eng.
- b. 10 f. 8 **Romanian part translated for Kalich** undated
- b. 10 f. 9 **Sappho** by Jacob Gordin, sides 1915
Yiddish, transl. Eng.
- b. 10 f. 10 **Sisters** by J. Peretz 1906
Yiddish, transl. Eng.
- b. 10 f. 11 **Skyscraper** by Sandburg, **Book 3, promptbook** undated
The Slave by Ossip Dymov undated

Series IV: Scripts (cont.)

The Slave by Ossip Dymov (cont.)

- b. 11 f. 1-3 Drafts of script
- b. 11 f. 4 Promptbook
- b. 11 f. 5 The Song of Songs, script undated
- b. 11 f. 6 The Storm, script undated
Yiddish, annotated
Therese Raquin by Emile Zola undated
- b. 11 f. 7 Script
- b. 11 f. 8 Sides
- b. 11 f. 9 Three-prose poems by Oscar Wilde, promptbook undated
- b. 11 f. 10 Unidentified notes undated
Yiddish, transl. Eng.
- b. 11 f. 11 The Vanzinige Primadonna by Jacob Gordin, script undated
Warheit undated
- b. 11 f. 12 Script, Act III
Yiddish, annotated
- b. 11 f. 13 Sides and handwritten script
- b. 11 f. 14 The Witch by Hans Wiers-Jenssen, adapted by Herman Hagedorn, script
1910
- b. 11 f. 15 Yiddish bound pieces for performance undated
- b. 12 f. 1 Yiddish pieces for performance undated
- b. 12 f. 2 Yiddish play, unidentified undated
- b. 12 f. 3 Yiddish play, unidentified undated
- b. 12 f. 4 Yiddish poems and other pieces for performance undated
Translated in English.

Series V: Photographs 1892-1935, undated (1 box)

The series is comprised of black and white portraits, snapshots, mounted photographs, and negatives of family and business associates.

Alphabetical

- b. 13 f. 1 Associates of Bertha Kalich 1892-1935, undated
- b. 13 f. 2-3 Lillian Kalich undated
- b. 13 f. 4-6 Personal photographs undated
- b. 13 f. 7 Photocopies of signed photographs undated
- b. 13 f. 8 Unidentified 1905-1910, undated
Includes negatives.

Series VI: Clippings 1895-1949, undated (2 boxes)

This series consists of two boxes of loose clippings, primarily in English and Yiddish. The bulk of these clippings date primarily from 1925-1927 when Kalich was at the height of her career and touring across the United States. They are primarily clippings of theatrical reviews of Bertha Kalich's various performances.

Chronological

- b. 14 f. 1 1895-1904
- b. 14 f. 2 1904-1905

Series VI: Clippings (cont.)

b. 14 f. 3	1906
b. 14 f. 4	1907
b. 14 f. 5	1908
b. 14 f. 6	1909
b. 14 f. 7	1911
b. 14 f. 8	1912
b. 14 f. 9	1913
b. 14 f. 10	1914
b. 14 f. 11	1915
b. 14 f. 12	1916
b. 14 f. 13	1917
b. 14 f. 14	1918
b. 14 f. 15	1919
b. 14 f. 16	1920
b. 14 f. 17	1921
b. 14 f. 18-19	1922
b. 14 f. 20	1924
b. 14 f. 21	1925
b. 14 f. 22-31	1926
b. 14 f. 32-44	1927
b. 15 f. 1	1928
b. 15 f. 2	1929
b. 15 f. 3	1930
b. 15 f. 4	1931
b. 15 f. 5	1932
b. 15 f. 6	1933
b. 15 f. 7	1934
b. 15 f. 8	1935
b. 15 f. 9-10	1936
b. 15 f. 11	1938
b. 15 f. 12	1939
b. 15 f. 13	1949
b. 15 f. 14	Undated

Series VII: Scrapbooks 1905-1927, undated (8 boxes)

This series contains photograph and clippings scrapbooks including production stills and theater news in both Yiddish and English.

Subseries 1: Photograph scrapbooks 1906-1908, undated

This subseries contains three scrapbooks of photographs. They include production stills from *Sappho and Phaon*, *Marta of the Lowlands*, *Cora and The Unbroken Road*, *Monna Vanna*, and *The Kreutzer Sonata*.

Chronological

Series VII: Scrapbooks (cont.)

Subseries 1: Photograph scrapbooks (cont.)

- b. 16 Photograph Scrapbook of black and white photographs from Cora and The Unbroken Road undated
- b. 17 Photograph Scrapbook of black and white photographs from Monna Vanna undated
- b. 18 Photograph Scrapbook of black and white photographs from Sappho, Phaon, and Marta of the Lowlands 1907-1908

Subseries 2: Clippings scrapbooks 1905-1927, undated

This subseries includes five clippings scrapbooks that contain clippings in both Yiddish and English. The clippings date mainly from 1906 and document Kalich's theatrical appearances in *Monna Vanna*, *Fedora*, and *The Riddle Woman*, as well as her film project entitled *Ambition*. They also include items covering general theater news.

Chronological

- b. 19-20 Clippings scrapbook {1905; 1905
- b. 21 Clippings scrapbook marked 1916 1916
- b. 22 Clippings scrapbook labeled Madame Bertha Kalich in The Riddle Woman season of 1918 1918, 1923
- b. 23 Clippings scrapbook labeled Magda 1925-1927